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# JOHN GODFREY SAXE

R. W. TAFT



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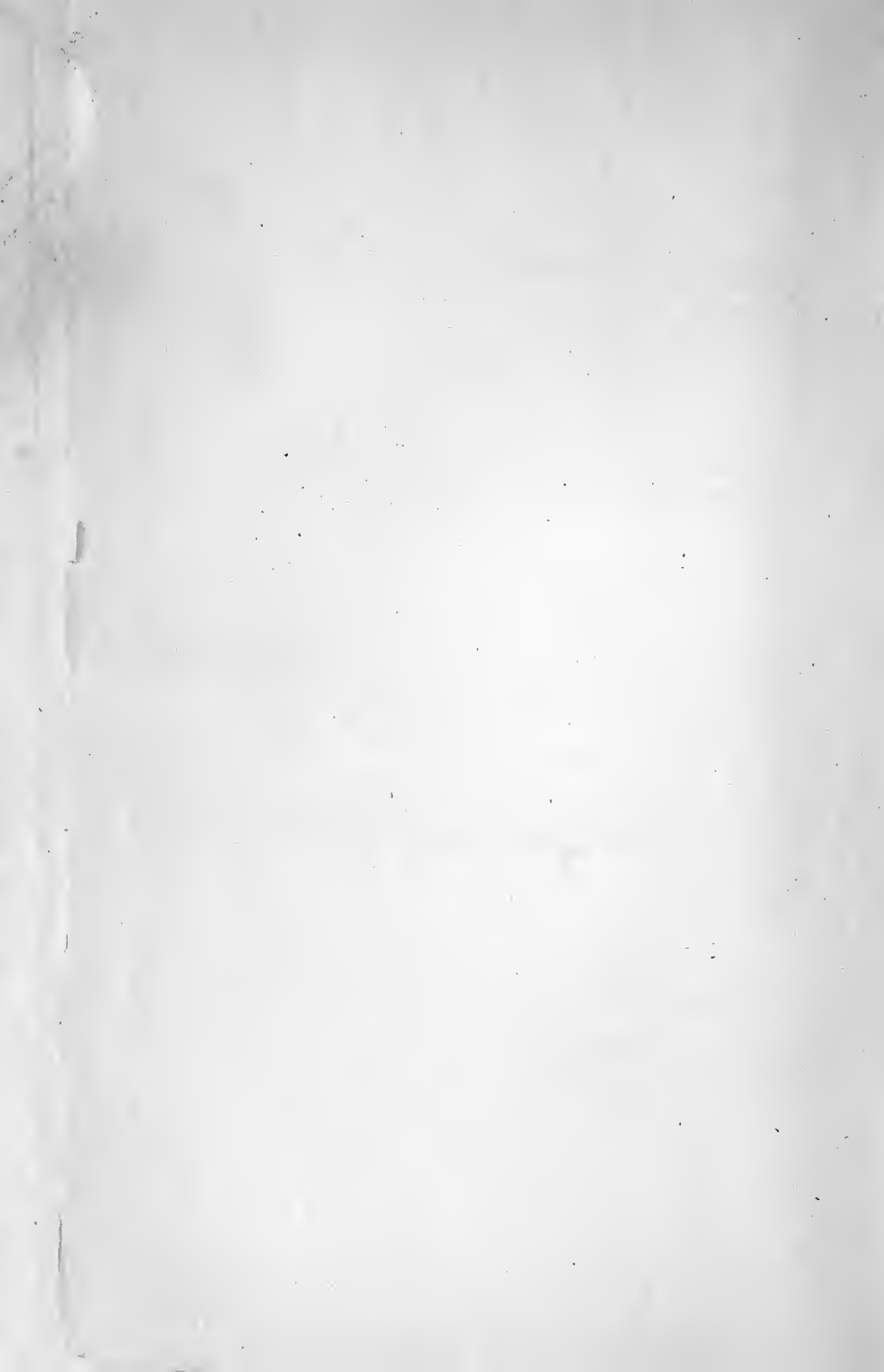
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





# JOHN GODFREY SAXE.

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A Biographical Sketch of Vermont's Lawyer,  
Journalist, Lecturer and Rhymster.

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BY RUSSELL W. TAFT.

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One of One Hundred Copies Privately  
Printed.

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Burlington, Vermont.

1900.

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## TO THE READER.

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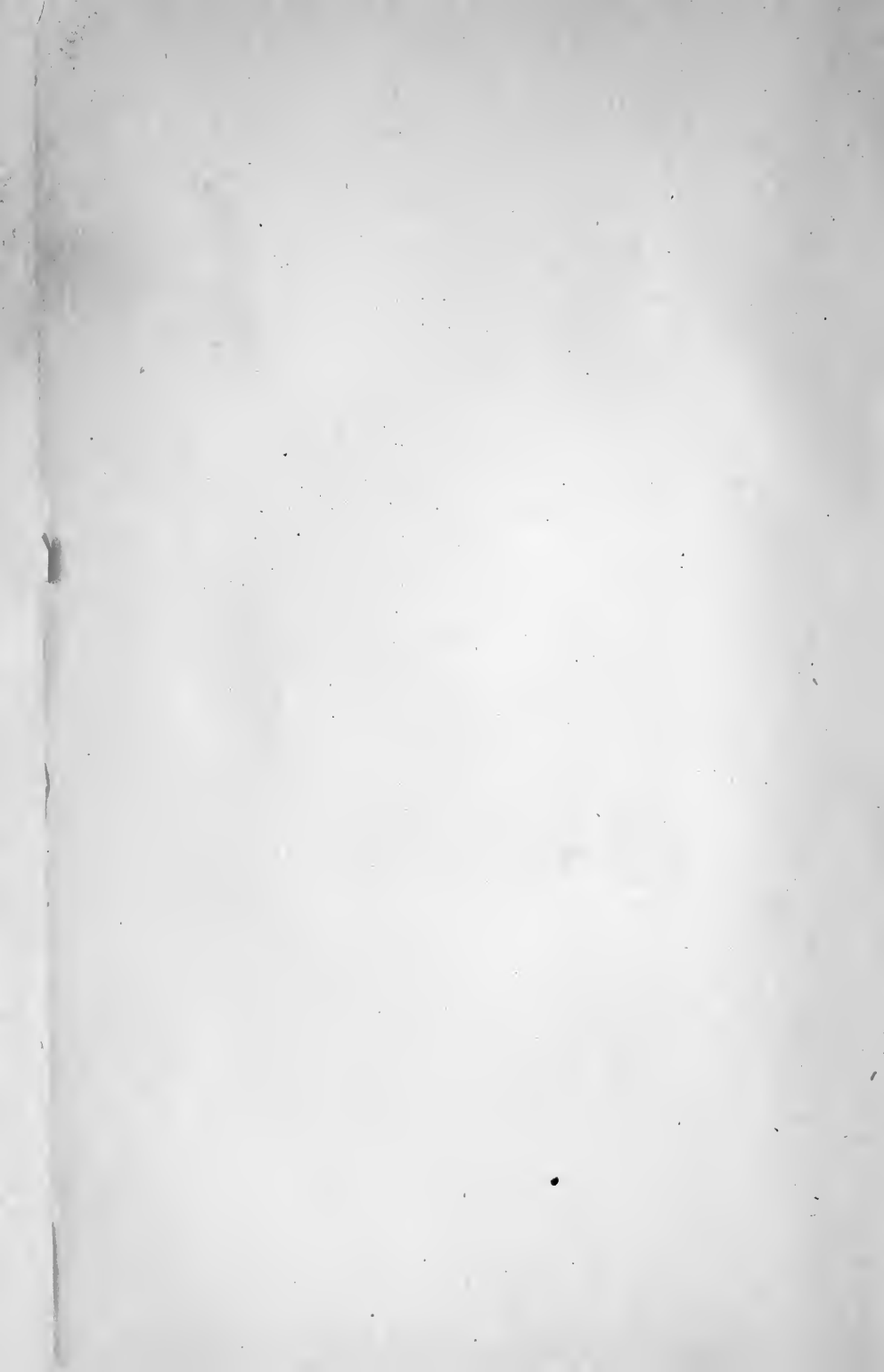
It is unnecessary to remark that the following sketch is carelessly written and hastily compiled. It is reprinted from a series of articles appearing in the Vermont University *Cynic* during the winter of 1899-1900 and is, so far as we have been able to ascertain, the first published biography of the poet. As, in the future, the compiler may attempt a more carefully written tribute to Saxe's memory, he earnestly requests those into whose hands the present work may come to communicate to him any errors or inconsistencies that they may detect, as well as facts or incidents that will add completeness to the sketch.

R. W. T.

Burlington, Vt., March 30, 1900.

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804-- Oct. 14/16.



JOHN G. SAXE.

## JOHN GODFREY SAXE.

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### I.

A German origin must be assigned to the Saxe family, the ancestor of which, John Sachse, immigrated early to the Dutch settlements along the Hudson river. Many of the Dutch and German settlers were Tories who, to escape political difficulties, moved further north. Among them John Sachse or Saxe removed in 1787 through Lake Champlain to Highgate, the extreme northwest town of the mainland of Vermont, taking with him his wife and a family of eight sons and one daughter. The same year he built the first grist mill in northern Vermont on "Saxe's brook," tributary to Rock river, a small stream in the northwest corner of the township, where a little settlement is still known as "Saxe's Mill." The dam still remains to testify to the care with which it was planned and constructed. Prior to this the nearest mills were at Plattsburgh, New York, across Lake Champlain by canoe, or at Burlington thirty-five miles distant. The mill must have been a welcome institution for there were no houses between Saxe's mill and Burlington and it is recorded that John Saxe in 1787 "visited Burlington with no

guide but his pocket compass, over a trail beset with hostile savages." John Saxe was a man of ability and perseverance, in every way calculated to cope with the hardships of a first settlement. He had, with his family, many perils to encounter and trials to endure; they were harrassed by the noble red men and less noble but more inoffensive bears and catamounts and it is chronicled that at one time Mr. Saxe was obliged to swim the river breaking the ice with his hands, though as to the reason therefor the annalist is silent.

The children of John Saxe were John, George, William, Matthew, Godfrey, Peter, Jacob, Conrad and Hannah. John, the eldest, died at the age of twenty-two; Godfrey at twenty-eight; Jacob carried on the furnace business; Conrad was a blacksmith and farmer; George a trapper and cattle drover; William turned his hand to surveying; Matthew, who was first town clerk of Highgate, became a wheelwright and afterwards a merchant, while Peter kept a store and later managed his father's mill. It needs but a glance at the early annals of Highgate to assure one that the family were prominent in town affairs. In the first book of records the first record is a bond from Ira Allen of Colchester to John Saxe, dated July 31, 1792. John Saxe was town treasurer in 1799.

The first marriage in Highgate, that of Andrew Wilson and Rachel Wilson, was performed March 19, 1800, by Matthew Saxe, J. P.; the first death was that of Catherine, wife of John Saxe, in 1791; in 1801 the first store and tavern was kept by Matthew, Godfrey and Peter Saxe; 1799, 1800, 1805 and 1806 Matthew Saxe was town clerk, a position held by his brother Peter in 1810, 1811, 1828 and 1829. Matthew was town representative in 1800 and 1802 as was Peter in 1806, 1807, 1818 and 1827. Peter, who seems to have been the politician of the family, was postmaster and justice of the peace as well as, in 1818, county judge for the county of Franklin. In 1806, 1807 and 1811 he was selectman as was Conrad, his brother, in 1821. Conrad, the belligerent of the group, was one of Highgate's twelve militia captains and served in that capacity in the war of 1812, doing garrison duty at Swanton Falls. At the time of the battle of Plattsburgh he raised a company of volunteers but was not on the scene, being unable to obtain transportation further than Grand Isle, where the cannonading was plainly heard.

Peter Saxe, storekeeper, mill-owner and local politician, married, in 1813, Elizabeth Jewett, and their second son, for whom a niche at least may be reserved in America's literary Valhalla, is the subject of the present sketch. John God-

frey Saxe was born in Highgate on June 2, 1816, one day later than Charles Gamage Eastman, Vermont's lyric poet.

Saxe's early years passed quietly away. From his ninth to his seventeenth year he attended district school and worked in his father's mill. Tradition—in the guise of the "oldest inhabitant"—recalls him as a care-free, happy-go-lucky, whistling, barefoot lad, tall and lank, forever roaming about with the cattle and flocks and conducting himself generally in a manner that won him among the puritanical neighbors the name of "Saxe's fool," an appellation the merit of which he soon amply disproved. Mrs. Caroline (Brown) Freer, who died recently at Warren, Ohio, at the advanced age of ninety-three, taught when she was eighteen years of age, the district school near Saxe's mill and boarded in the Saxe family. John was one of her pupils and she often recalled him as a lively, mischievous and sometimes unruly lad, to whose shoulders she was many a time obliged to apply the rod. Mrs. Freer treasured jealously the poet's first attempt at versification, which he sent her after she left Highgate. The paper is yellow and the ink faded but the sentiment remains.

"You go away, while here I stay  
But still we join in heart,  
Farewell! And be your journey here  
A pathway to a brighter sphere."

In later years Saxe's loyalty to his old teacher did not abate and he visited her frequently.

A pleasant reminiscence of the poet's childhood is found in his ballad of "Little Jerry, the Miller."

#### LITTLE JERRY, THE MILLER.

Beneath the hill you may see the mill  
 Of wasting wood and crumbling stone ;  
 The wheel is dripping and clattering still,  
 But Jerry, the miller, is dead and gone.  
 Year after year, early and late,  
 Alike in summer and winter weather,  
 He pecked the stones and calked the gate,  
 And mill and miller grew old together.  
 "Little Jerry !"—'t was all the same,—  
 They loved him well who called him so ;  
 And whether he'd ever another name,  
 Nobody ever seemed to know.  
 'Twas, "Little Jerry, come grind my rye ;"  
 And "Little Jerry, come grind my wheat ;"  
 And "Little Jerry" was still the cry,  
 From matron bold and maiden sweet.  
 'Twas "Little Jerry" on every tongue,  
 And so the simple truth was told ;  
 For Jerry was little when he was young,  
 And Jerry was little when he was old.  
 But what in size he chanced to lack,  
 That Jerry made up in being strong ;  
 I've seen a sack upon his back  
 As thick as the miller, and quite as long.  
 Always busy, and always merry,  
 Always doing his very best,

A notable wag was Little Jerry,  
Who uttered well his standing jest.

How Jerry lived is known to fame,  
But how he died there's none may know;  
One autumn day the rumor came,  
"The brook and Jerry are very low."

And then 't was whispered, mournfully,  
The leech had come, and he was dead;  
And all the neighbors flocked to see;  
"Poor Little Jerry!" was all they said.

They laid him in his earthy bed,—  
His miller's coat his only shroud;  
"Dust to dust," the parson said,  
And all the people wept aloud.

For he had shunned the deadly sin,  
And not a grain of over-toll  
Had ever dropped into his bin,  
To weigh upon his parting soul.

Beneath the hill there stands the mill,  
Of wasting wood and crumbling stone;  
The wheel is dripping and clattering still,  
But Jerry, the Miller, is dead and gone.

Little Jerry, a diminutive Frenchman of remarkable strength, wit and good nature, for many years tended the grists at the mill in Highgate. Saxe says of him: "His surname was written 'Goodheart' in the mill-books; but he often told me that our English translation was quite too weak, as the real name was spelled '*Fortboncoeur*.'"



However, the days

“ When knaves were only found in books,  
And friends were known by friendly looks,  
And love was always true !”

sped by  
all too soon. In 1833 and '34 Saxe attended the Grammar School of St. Albans where he prepared for college. In 1835 he entered Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, but did not stay the year out. In those days a college education was acquired under difficulties that would discourage an average youth of the present generation. Railroads were few and long journeys had to be made on horseback or in heavy stage-coaches, lumbering over rough and uneven roads, and many a stout-hearted boy, fired by an ambition that was later to win him fame and wealth, has footed it to school and home again. “College” then meant separation from home and friends for the whole year, perhaps for the whole course—a serious thing in a boy’s sight. This may be why Saxe continued his pursuit of knowledge nearer home, for, in the fall of 1836, he enrolled himself in the sophomore class of Middlebury College, being then twenty years of age. Like many another he had to economize while struggling for an education, but his nature was optimistic and he was always on the sunny side of fate, so it is not to be supposed that a few

discouragements made his college days any the less joyous. At any rate in his "*Carmen Laetum*" occur these lines reminiscent of undergraduate life :

" Ah ! well I remember the halcyon years,  
Too earnest for laughter, too pleasant for tears,  
When life was a boon in yon classical court,  
Though lessons were long and though commons were  
short !"

Commons referred to the daily meals. Then, as now, the students contributed each a small sum weekly toward the support of the dining hall and shared their meals in common. This was easier upon the boys' pockets, though harder perhaps upon their digestive apparatus, for there was no startling variety to the bill of fare nor was there always enough to satisfy the vigorous appetites that were concerned, and often it was a case of "first come, first served." In the same poem Saxe also recalls President Bates in the words :

" Ah ! well I remember the President's face,  
As he sat at the lecture with dignified grace,  
And neatly unfolded the mystical themes  
Of various deep, metaphysical schemes,—  
How he brightened the path of his studious flock,  
And he gave them a key to that wonderful *Locke* ;  
How he taught us to feel it was fatal indeed  
With too much reliance to lean upon *Reid*."

The members of Saxe's class were, for the most part, sober minded and studious young men, devoted to the prescribed course of study. Of the thirty-seven who graduated, two embraced the medical profession, nine became lawyers, nine became teachers, and the remaining seventeen preached the gospel. While Saxe did not neglect the regular studies of the course, his taste ran more in the line of literature and the *belles lettres*. In mathematics he was an average student and, though an ardent lover of the classics, his translations were rather elegant than literal. His love for the classics continued unabated throughout his life. The allusions to Latin authors so common in his poems attest an intimate acquaintance with Virgil, Ovid and Horace, while we find in an old St. Albans Republican the following apt rendition of a certain English juvenile classic into the mother tongue.

#### JACK ET GILLA.

Jack et Gilla  
 Ascendunt montem,  
 Aquam parare  
 Ad certem fontem,  
 Procidit Jack,  
 Et praeter hac,  
 Frangit ejus *fundum*—  
 Et de Gilla,  
 Etiam illa,  
 Procidit secundum.

In person Saxe was of fine presence. He was tall and erect, with a kindly face framed in flowing locks, a clear skin and a deep gray eye. His manners were pleasing and a certain youthful awkwardness soon disappeared under the influence of his social life, for he at once became a favorite both in college and in the town. He was a great smoker and was known, accordingly, as "Tobacco Saxe" among the girls. Saxe studied while in college, to make a good conversationalist and gave presage of many of the qualities that afterward appeared in his writings. He was witty, happy in repartee, something of a punster and was well equipped with funny anecdotes that he employed skilfully, thereby making himself an entertaining and attractive companion, albeit with a spice of egotism. His literary taste was far above the average; he read extensively the works of standard English authors, both in prose and poetry, and was fond of quoting their brightest and most brilliant thoughts. As a debater he ranked well and it was a pleasure to listen to him in Lyceum, while if a literary program was the order of the day he was assured of a prominent place.

The young collegian's *suaviter in modo* stood him in good stead. He could far outdo any member of his class in politeness gotten up for the occasion when called upon

to answer a question upon which he was totally unprepared ; nor did he ever hesitate for a reply. He was generally among the last to enter the chapel for morning prayers. On one occasion the students apparently had all assembled and the exercises were about to commence, when Saxe came hurrying in, his long overcoat flung over his shoulders. As he was hastening to his seat the President addressed him, "Good morning, Mr. Saxe." He turned toward the President with a graceful salute, and with a deep, clear voice returned the greeting, "Good morning, President Bates." No one else in the audience could have returned the President's greeting under those circumstances so imperturbably. As showing Saxe's versatility in adapting means to ends Rev. Byron Sunderland of Washington, D. C., relates this incident: "Saxe roomed as other students did, over the then famous bookstore of Jonathan Hagar in the vicinity of 'the river Styx,' which meandered between the village and the first old square frame college building, then used for chapel and students' rooms. I remember one cheerless autumn morning about 5 o'clock, on my way to chapel prayers, calling at his room in Hagar's whose fair daughters, by the way, at their room on Weybridge street, had the night before entertained a formal company, of whom Saxe was one. As I knocked for admis-

sion, his loud, clear voice replied, 'Come in,' and there he was just out of bed, with his black pants in one hand and stick of sealing wax in the other, bending over the feeble flame of a sputtering tallow candle and trying with the melted wax to patch a rent which unfortunately had been made in his nether garments the night before. As I looked in upon him he caught my eye with a most quizzical expression, and pointing to the rent in his dark pants, which now showed at a little distance off to be only a blood-red spot as of a discoloration or a stain, he remarked, '*That*, now I take it, has been done with neatness and dispatch.' Then taking his quill pen, he smeared the wax with ink and hastily jumped into his clothes, crying as he donned his broad-brimmed hat, 'Come on, my son, we shall be late to prayers.'"

Prof. Truman K. Wright of Elbridge, N. Y., who was a classmate of Saxe, writes as follows: "Saxe was genial, jovial and inclined to be wag gish. His room-mate Wicker was a fine scholar in mathematics, and once solved a difficult problem for the next day's recitation by working until midnight; and when he went to bed he left the solution on his writing desk. Saxe came in late, saw the problem worked, and examined it somewhat. When the bell rang in the morning Wicker was sound asleep. Saxe gathered up

the manuscript, noiselessly closed the door, and hastened to the recitation room, where he spread out the solution upon the black-board. Great was the astonishment to see Saxe solve the most difficult problem of the day ; in fact the astonishment was so great that though intended to be a joke on Wicker, it proved to be a joke on Saxe."

Edwin Everts, who died in 1898 at Virden. Ill., was the poet's intimate college friend. They were interchangeable guests almost daily, were both in attendance at the winter term of the senior year, read, recited and talked French together under the tutelage of Prof. Stoddard, and belonged to the "Tub Philosophers." Painter Hall, in which Saxe roomed the latter part of his course, is still standing, though unoccupied. The room in which the poet spent his college days is small and plain ; the plaster is falling off and the doors and window cases are battered and scarred.

## II.

Strange to say, Saxe, when in college, did not woo the muse as ardently as prevalent undergraduate tradition demanded, yet he was considered the poet of the class and whenever he read a few stanzas before them he was listened to with marked attention. He and his classmate, Carlos Bisbee were rival versifiers. On one occasion when Bisbee had read a few stanzas before the class, after the class was dismissed Saxe exclaimed with considerable stress : " Bisbee a poet ! Bisbee write poetry ? He doesn't know enough to steal a good poem ! "

Saxe's first literary efforts were published about the beginning of his junior year in the local prints. " My Uncle William or Love vs. Law " was his first printed effort and was meritorious chiefly on account of its brevity. " The Autobiography of a Pocket Knife," the next offspring of his budding fancy, also shows no palpable traces of genius. Later on Saxe became a member of the " Tub Philosophers a la Diogenes " who turned loose their literary talent on the Green Mountain Argus. The Philosophers' salutatory was by Saxe and ran as follows :

Gentle Read—but hold, we do not know that you are gentle ; nor, indeed are we quite sure



you would like the application of the term to yourself, however appropriate. Gentleness, unluckily enough, has almost ceased to be thought a virtue. Indeed, it has come to be regarded as unbecoming a man, barely pardonable in women and indispensable in horses. "The animal is perfectly gentle, sir." You will hardly hear the word in any other connection. We will try again.

Intelligent reader—alas! how few readers are intelligent! how few thoroughly understand a tithe of what they read. How few are careful always to "regard the writer's end." How often is he dispraised as superficial, when he never meant to be profound. How often denied the praise of wit, when he aims only to be pleasant. We'll try once more.

Indulgent reader—the phrase sounds smoothly—but alas! how few readers are indulgent. How ready are many persons to misconstrue and pervert whatever is susceptible of distortion, or, more unfairly still, "hide each virtue in some neighboring vice." Almost the only reader who may be allowed the title of indulgent, is the author,—when reading his own productions. The world is deplorably selfish, and people have little indulgence for other people's children. Again have we wandered from our subject,—let us return once more.

Reader ! whatever title suit thee best—gentle, or simple—intelligent, or stupid,—indulgent, or severe,—we, the “Tub Philosophers”, quite unknown to you, but very well known among ourselves, intend to write, and very respectfully request you to read. If you will not, your folly will be upon your own heads. “Let every Tub stand on its own bottom.”

To the ensuing philosophical flux Saxe seems to have contributed several bits of verse as well as six “Semi-Moral Essays” the fourth of which we venture to quote :

#### SHAKING HANDS:

The lesser civilities of human life, however trivial their appearance when separately considered, contribute largely in their collective influence to the sum total of human happiness. Indeed, they may be regarded as distinctive characteristics of enlightened society ; and, in every nation, the growth of refined etiquette marks with great accuracy the grade of civilization. The various rites of urbanity are not only the invariable attendants, but eminently productive of good society ; and are hence, worthy of the most punctual observance. Of all the forms of courtesy which prevail at the present day, none is of more frequent occurrence than “shaking hands.” It is the most general and expressive

mode of salutation in the civilized world. It is a token of amity—a pledge of good faith—a confession of friendship—or, the seal of pardon.

Without undertaking to point out the most refined and eligible style of shaking hands, I shall proceed to describe, as accurately as may be, the different methods which ought to be avoided. First in the list comes the pump-handle shake. The epithet is sufficiently significant to illustrate the *modus operandi*. It is a regular, mechanical, perpendicular motion, and highly inelegant . . . . “pray you avoid it.” Then there’s your horizontal shake—quite as indecorous as the other, and more dangerous. It is the very motion that Hamlet cautioned the players against when he said “do not saw the air too much.” In performing the horizontal shake, your friend grasps your hand and violently jerks your arm from right to left with the apparent purpose of dislocating your shoulder. It is worse than the fever and ague—bating the fever.

Commend such fellows to my enemies. Next, comes the sentimental shake; it is practiced chiefly by romantic young ladies, and delicate young gentlemen in white kid gloves. It is a misnomer, however, to call it a shake—it’s only contact at best. If you ever approached a young lady with the design of saluting her—don’t be alarmed, madam,—with the design, I say, of

shaking her hand, and received a lifeless lump of clay, extended with a languid air, as though energy were indelicate or criminal—if you have been through with all this, you have a very good idea of the “shake sentimental.” I prefer the cold bath. It is amusing to see one of the sentimental shakers encounter one of the pump-handle order. However, between the inertia of the one and the vigor of the other, you get a resultant motion not far from the true standard.

Some persons have a habit of offering a single finger. It is a scurvy practice—a pitiful evasion of duty—a miserable attempt to defraud. It is the conduct of a solvent debtor who tenders you one-fifth of your dues—who proposes to compound at twenty per cent on the dollar. If any person offer to treat you thus ungenerously—allow him to shake a corner of your pocket-handkerchief.

Some people, to the great scandal of good manners, offer you their left hand. Don’t take it. A man has no *right* to give you his left hand; besides he cannot do it dexterously. *Pause* before you accept it—the person who presents it, may fairly be suspected of sinister motives.

I must not omit to mention the squeezers. These fellows seem to think it a virtue to crush your very bones with the violence of their grasp.

Depend upon it, it's a vice. Commend me a "bear-hug" in preference.

Give me the man who meets me half way—looks me full in the face, and gives me a cordial, generous shake; not with the violence of a wrestler, but with a temperate vigor which bespeaks a feeling too respectful to be rude.

Several of Saxe's later epigrams, among them "A Plain Case" and "Lucus a Non," seem to smack of college sentiment.

#### A PLAIN CASE.

"When Tutor Thompson goes to bed,  
That very moment, it is said,  
The cautious man puts out the light,  
And draws the curtain snug and tight.  
You marvel much why this should be,  
But when his spouse you chance to see,  
What seemed before a puzzling case  
Is plain as — Mrs. Thompson's face!"

#### LUCUS A NON.

"You'll oft find in books, rather ancient than recent,  
A gap in the page marked with "*cetera desunt*,"  
By which you may commonly take it for granted  
The passage is wanting without being wanted;  
And may borrow, besides, a significant hint  
That *desunt* means simply *not* decent to print!"

While in college Saxe did not belong to a Greek letter fraternity; in fact there were no Greek societies at Middlebury until 1843, when the Mu chapter of Chi Psi was founded. In 1853, however, the poet was enrolled as an honorary member of Psi Upsilon by the Harvard Alpha Chapter. The circumstances of the initiation are thus recalled by Rev. W. S. Mackenzie, D. D., in the "Diamond" of Psi Upsilon:

"I very well remember the night that he was made a member of the Alpha Chapter of Fair Harvard. He had been chosen to deliver the poem at the anniversary in Cambridge in 1853, and two or three weeks previous to the event he came out to Cambridge to be installed as a member of the Alpha. We made a little feast for the occasion, and after the installation services we sat down to eat, drink and make such speeches as the time suggested. Mr. Saxe was very joyous and witty. When he left at midnight to return by coach to The Revere House his hat was missing and he had to return hatless to Boston. Soon afterward the Chapter had a large, very fine hat made and sent him at Burlington, Vermont. In return he forwarded a framed crayon bust of himself, and on the lower margin of the picture was the following autograph verse—

'An exchange—it will be said—  
Remarkably equal and pat;  
You sent him a hat for his head,  
And he sends you his head for his hat!'"

The poet's love for Psi Upsilon and its members was deep and lasting and he was a familiar figure at the reunions and banquets of the order where some of his cleverest thoughts were delivered as toasts. On July 21, 1853, a few weeks after his initiation, at the festival referred to, Saxe read some characteristic post-prandial verses, part of which ran as follows :

"Success to Psi Upsilon !—Beautiful name !—  
To the eye and the ear it is pleasant the same ;  
Many thanks to old Cadmus who made us his debtors,  
By inventing, one day, those capital letters  
Which still, from the heart, we shall know how to speak  
When we've fairly forgotten the rest of our Greek !"

The closing lines ran thus :

"Remember 'tis blessed to give and forgive ;  
Live chiefly to love, and love while you live ;  
And dying, when life's little journey is done,  
May your last, fondest sigh be PSI Upsilon !"

The last line of the above is still current among the members of the fraternity, and with them the poet's popularity is yet undimmed. His eldest son and grandson both became members—the former honorarily at Union College and the latter at Columbia, where he is at present a law student.

Saxe took from Middlebury the degree of A. B. in 1839 and A. M. in 1843, while in 1866 his Alma Mater conferred upon him the honorary degree of LL. D., which, indeed, he merited as a man of letters rather than as a man of law.

## III.

Upon his graduation from college Saxe went to Lewiston, near Lockport, N. Y., to engage in the study of the law, but returned to Vermont, presumably to take unto himself a helpmate, for, on September 9, 1841, he was wedded to Miss Sophia Newell Sollace, sister of a classmate, Calvin T. Sollace, and daughter of the Hon. Calvin S. Sollace of Bridport, Vt. Mrs. Saxe, who was her husband's junior by three years, was regarded as the belle of her native town.

Mr. Saxe completed his reading in Vermont and was admitted to the bar in St. Albans in September, 1843. For the next seven years he was engaged in the practice of his profession at St. Albans and at Highgate. While residing at the latter place he attained the exalted distinction of being elected justice of the peace.

Saxe was all his life a zealous and consistent democrat and, shortly after becoming a lawyer, he seems to have turned his pen to some account politically. During the Clay campaign of 1844 he contributed various campaign songs and squibs to the St. Albans *Republican*. One of the epigrams runs thus :



## EPIGRAM.

The image of the Syrian monarch's dream  
 A type of modern whiggery would seem—  
 A little gold, some iron and much *brass*  
 Composed in part the ill compounded mass,  
 But yet so strong, it might have stood to-day,  
 Had not its *pedestal* been made of *Clay*!

For the term of a year (1847-48) Mr. Saxe served as superintendent of the common schools of Franklin county. His experiences among the teachers undoubtedly prompted his clever bit of verse, "Ye Pedagogue," which has offered many an audacious urchin an opportunity to "get even" with a tyrannical master on "Declamation" day.

## YE PEDAGOGUE.

(A Ballad.).

## I.

Righte learnéd is ye Pedagogue,  
 Fulle apt to reade and spelle,  
 And eke to teache ye parts of speeche,  
 And strap ye urchins welle.

## II.

For as 'tis meete to soake ye feete,  
 Ye ailinge heade to mende,  
 Ye younker's pate to stimulate,  
 He beats ye other ende!

## III.

Right lordlie is ye Pedagogue  
 As any turbaned Turke;  
 For welle to rule ye District Schoole,  
 It is no idle worke.

## IV.

For oft Rebellion lurketh there  
 In breaste of secrete foes,  
 Of malice fulle, in waite to pulle  
 Ye Pedagogue his nose !

## V.

Sometimes he heares with trembling feares,  
 Of ye ungodlie rogue  
 On mischieffe bent, with felle intent  
 To licke ye Pedagogue !

## VI.

And if ye Pedagogue be smalle,  
 When to ye battell led,  
 In such a plight, God sende him mighte  
 To breake ye rogue his heade !

## VII.

Daye after daye, for little paye,  
 He teacheth what he can,  
 And bears ye yoke, to please ye folke,  
 And ye committee-man.

## VIII.

Ah ! many crosses hath he borne,  
 And many trials founde,  
 Ye while he trudged ye district through  
 And boarded rounde and rounde !

## IX.

Ah ! many a steake hath he devoured,  
 That, by ye taste and sighte,  
 Was in disdaine, 'twas very plaine,  
 Of Daye his patent righte !

## X.

Fulle solemn is ye Pedagogue,  
 Amonge ye noisy churls,  
 Yet other while he hath a smile  
 To give ye handsome girls.

## XI.

And one,—ye farest mayde of all,—  
 To cheere his wayninge life,  
 Shall be, when springe ye flowers shall bringe,  
 Ye Pedagogue his wife !

This is a specimen of the poet's best work and aptly illustrates the off hand play of his nimble wit. It also hints at one of the reasons why his fame has declined—the local allusions so common in all his work. The reference in verse IX to the inventor of "patent leather," then just coming into vogue, would scarcely be understood by the rising generation.

As a young lawyer Saxe's literary fame began to broaden through his having become a regular contributor to the *Knickerbocker*, the leading magazine of that day. One of his first contributions was the "Rhyme of the Rail" upon which, perhaps more than any other, rested his early fame. It went the rounds of the press time and again and was known to generations of school-children. The sound admirably echoes the sense. In reading it one can close his eyes and almost hear the varied sounds that form an undersong to the monotonous rumble of the cars.

# RHYME OF THE RAIL.

Singing through the forests,  
 Rattling over ridges,  
 Shooting under arches,  
 Rumbling over bridges,  
 Whizzing through the mountains,  
 Buzzing o'er the vale,—  
 Bless me ! this is pleasant,  
 Riding on the Rail !

Men of different "stations"  
 In the eye of Fame  
 Here are very quickly  
 Coming to the same.  
 High and lowly people,  
 Birds of every feather,  
 On a common level  
 Travelling together !

Gentleman in shorts,  
 Looming very tall ;  
 Gentleman at large,  
 Talking very small ;  
 Gentleman in tights,  
 With a loose-ish mien ;  
 Gentleman in gray,  
 Looking rather green.

Gentleman quite old,  
 Asking for the news ;  
 Gentleman in black,  
 In a fit of blues ;  
 Gentleman in claret,  
 Sober as a vicar ;  
 Gentleman in Tweed,  
 Dreadfully in liquor !

Stranger on the right,  
 Looking very sunny,  
 Obviously reading  
 Something rather funny.  
 Now the smiles are thicker,  
 Wonder what they mean?  
 Faith he's got the KNICKER-  
 BOCKER magazine !

Stranger on the left,  
 Closing up his peepers ;  
 Now he snores amain,  
 Like the Seven Sleepers ;  
 At his feet a volume  
 Gives the explanation,  
 How the man grew stupid  
 From " Association !"

Ancient maiden lady  
 Anxiously remarks,  
 That there must be peril  
 'Mong so many sparks !  
 Roguish-looking fellow,  
 Turning to the stranger,  
 Says it's his opinion  
*She* is out of danger !

Woman with her baby,  
 Sitting *vis-à-vis* ;  
 Baby keeps a squalling ;  
 Woman looks at me ;  
 Asks about the distance,  
 Says it's tiresome talking  
 Noises of the cars  
 Are so very shocking !

Market-woman careful  
 Of the precious casket,

Knowing eggs are eggs,  
 Tightly holds her basket ;  
 Feeling that a smash,  
 If it came, would surely  
 Send her eggs to pot  
 Rather prematurely !

Singing through the forests,  
 Rattling over ridges,  
 Shooting under arches,  
 Rumbling over bridges,  
 Whizzing through the mountains,  
 Buzzing o'er the vale,—  
 Bless me ! this is pleasant,  
 Riding on the Rail !

Saxe's services also began to be in demand at college commencements and like affairs. He read "Progress" before the Middlebury alumni in 1846, "The Times" before the Boston Mercantile Library Association in 1849, "Carmen Laetum" at Middlebury in 1850 and "New England" at the Hamilton College commencement of 1849. "New England" has disappeared. At least in none of Saxe's works does the title or theme appear and the poem was probably not deemed worthy of preservation. In view of this fact the following lurid notice in a local paper, elicited by its delivery at the commencement of the Henry Female College at Louisville, Kentucky, seems rather absurd :

"The poem of Saxe was supreme and inimitable, and perhaps we might as well relieve ourselves from the responsibility of saying anything further by adding that it was *indescribable*. It was perfectly magical. It was like that of some exquisite hymn at the close of a New England church service—heightened even above its intrinsic charm by the unbroken and wearying solemnity of the preceding rites. But its intrinsic charm required no heightening. The theme of the poem was the poet's own New England, and the poem itself was, or is (for we have no use for any tense but the present in speaking of so immortal a thing) an all but matchless combination of wit, humor, poetry, and patriotism. It is a sad mistake to fancy that Saxe is merely the wittiest of poets. He is among the most poetical of wits. His sense of the beautiful is large and delicate, and, on occasion, he can be as great as he always is smart. They must have strange eyes indeed who do not perceive the empyrean gleam of his genius through the starry host of his wit."

In 1846 Saxe's first published volume came from press, "Progress, a Satire." It was dedicated to Oliver Wendell Holmes after this fashion:

"To Oliver Wendell Holmes, as a slight token of the admiration which the writer entertains for his fine poetical genius ; his unequalled power of playful satire, and his terse and felicitous versification, this poem is respectfully inscribed by his obliged friend,

THE AUTHOR."

Progress was favorably received by the press and we venture to quote one of the notices as likely to prove of interest.

"A NEW SATIRE.—About six weeks ago there adventured into Gotham a sandy-haired, six-foot Vermonter, who in divers stage coaches, canal packets, and steamboats had found his way from the northwest corner of the Green Mountain State and brought with him the manuscript of a satirical poem entitled 'Progress,' which he wished to see in print. For a wonder, the very first publisher he called on agreed to bring it out, and it is very neatly done, by Mr. John Allen, and now lies before us, in a handsome pamphlet of 32 pp. 8vo. We had heard the verses well spoken of, and opening to the first page, read on as follows :

"In this, our happy and 'progressive' age,  
When all alike ambitious cares engage ;  
When beardless boys to sudden sages grow,  
And 'Miss' her nurse abandons for a beau ;



When for their dogmas Non-Resistants fight,  
 When dunces lecture and when dandies write ;  
 When matrons, seized with oratoric pangs,  
 Give happy birth! to masculine harangues,  
 And spinsters, trembling for the nation's fate,  
 Neglect their stockings to preserve the state ;  
 When critic-wits their brazen lustre shed  
 On golden authors whom they never read,  
 With parrot praise of 'Roman Grandeur,' speak,  
 And in bad English eulogize the Greek ;—  
 When facts like these no reprehension bring,  
 May not uncensured an attorney sing?

"Decidedly he may! If John G. Saxe, Esquire, sings in this fashion, he may as well sing on. Mr. Saxe, attorney, will be better known one of these days, than at present, or at least more widely. (A prophecy amply fulfilled.)

"Progress, the poem before us, made a sensation before it got into print. It was written at the request of the Associated Alumni of Middlebury College, and spoken before that society the 22d of last July (1846). It was in the Presbyterian meeting-house, where a laugh was considered highly improper, and any demonstration of applause little less than sacrilege. But before our attorney had read twenty lines the house was in a broad grin—a little further on there came 'a most unoriental roar of laughter,' and soon after came a burst of applause. The parsons could not hush

the noise for laughing. It was a literary excitement unparalleled in the Green Mountain State. We agree with the Associate Alumni, that *Progress* is a capital satire. They did very rightly in applauding it, even in a Presbyterian meeting house. The parsons need not be ashamed of their excited risibilities. The poem is the best of its kind that has been written in ten years—and touches up the topics of the day with exquisite humor, an easy flow of verse, a piquant wit, and a satire quite free from all malice."

In 1847 followed "The New Rape of the Lock," later known as "Captain Jones's Misadventure," but Saxe's literary reputation was not firmly established until in 1848 "Proud Miss MacBride" caught the public ear and won universal popularity for her author. This poem is a Yankee version of Hood's "Golden Legend." Its vigor may be judged by the following scathing arraignment of American family pride:

"Of all the notable things on earth,  
The queerest one is pride of birth,  
Among our 'fierce Democracy' !  
A bridge across a hundred years,  
Without a prop to save it from sneers,—  
Not even a couple of rotten Peers,—  
A thing for laughter, fleers, and jeers,  
Is American aristocracy !  
"English and Irish, French and Spanish,  
German, Italian, Dutch and Danish,

Crossing their veins until they vanish

In one conglomeration !

So subtle a tangle of blood indeed,

No modern Harvey will ever succeed

In finding the circulation !

“Depend upon it, my snobbish friend,

Your family thread you can't ascend,

Without good reason to apprehend

You may find it, waxed at the other end

By some plebean vocation ;

Or, worse than that, your boasted line

May end in a loop of stronger twine,

That plagued some worthy relation !”

In 1849 Saxe's first collected edition was issued at the instance of James T. Fields, the publisher, and from then on Saxe was a public character in American letters.

The following verses appeared in the *St. Albans Messenger* for March 27, 1848. They were addressed by Saxe to his friend, the late Dr. John L. Chandler. It seems the lawyer and doctor engaged in a friendly, metrical sparring match, these verses being in reply to some by the doctor.—

TO J. L. C.

A physician who heard, what no one discards,  
That Apollo was patron of doctors and bards,  
Conceived that himself, as a matter of course,  
Was endowed by the god with a duplicate force ;  
And licensed to dabble, whene'er he thought fit,  
With mercury, metaphor, jalop and wit.

"Dear doctor," quoth Phoebus, (who knows in a trice  
 What his sons are about,) "here's a bit of advice.  
 Don't mistake your vocation :—I've heard you rehearse  
 Most equivocal sense in most horrible verse :  
 I've seen you play doctor and bardling to boot,  
 Now mending a leg, and now marring a foot ;  
 Now talking of Attic-salt, then of salt-petre,  
 Now curing a cold and now murdering metre.  
 Nay ! Don't be offended. Away with that frown,  
 There isn't a better physician in town.  
 But the doctrine is settled and you ought to know it,  
 One may make a good poultice and not be a poet ;  
 May thrive as a doctor, yet fail as perfumer ;  
 May know much of *humors* and nothing of *humor*.  
 Thus I own you're a match for corporeal ills,  
 But doctor ! dear doctor ! pray stick to your pills."

## IV.

In 1850 Mr. Saxe removed to Burlington, to practice his profession, and for ten years lived at 177 South Union street, in the house now occupied by J. G. Bellrose. For the next year he served as state's attorney of Chittenden county, an office to which he was elected not without the suspicion of having been "counted in" by the town of Bolton. With his growing love for literary work law began to irk the poet and he often expressed the intention of giving it up as soon as he could find a more congenial means of making a living. He was not a success as a lawyer; the brilliancy of his intellect forbade his relishing the dry profundity of the abstract science, and his practice, which was never large, was cared for by ex-lieutenant governor Levi Underwood. His only appearance before the Supreme Court was in *State v. Woodward*—23 Vt. 92—argued for the State by "J. G. Saxe, state's attorney, with whom was L. Underwood." In this he seems to have had the wrong end of the argument for the decision favored the respondent, Woodward. Saxe's attitude toward the law is shown in some lines of advice to a young friend "who thinks he should like to be a lawyer" in which, among similar sentiments, he says :

“ No, no, my boy, let others sweat  
 And wrangle in the courts ;  
 There's nothing pleasing in a Plea ;  
 You cannot trust Reports.

“ Although the law of literature  
 May your attention draw,  
 I'm very sure you wouldn't like  
 The literature of Law.”

He once jocosely remarked that he was no lawyer, for out of three divorces secured by him “ two couples had remarried and gone to living together again.” Saxe was occasionally seen in the court room, located in what is now the Fletcher Library, where, during the trial of *Weed v. Beach*, a particularly tedious suit involving some water rights in the town of Jericho, he scribbled the following epigram for the edification of his legal brethren :

“ My wonder is really boundless,  
 That among the queer cases we try,  
 A land case should often be groundless,  
 And a water case always be dry.”

The law gave birth to some of the poet's cleverest verses. “ The Briefless Barrister ” published in the *Knickerbocker* for September, 1844, travelled fugitively through the papers of America and took a new lease of life after having been copied into *Punch*.

## THE BRIEFLESS BARRISTER.

An attorney was taking a turn,  
 In shabby habiliments drest ;  
 His coat it was shockingly worn,  
 And the rust had invested his vest.

His breeches had suffered a breach,  
 His linen and worsted were worse ;  
 He had scarce a whole crown in his hat,  
 And not half a crown in his purse.

And thus as he wandered along,  
 A cheerless and comfortless elf,  
 He sought for relief in a song,  
 Or complainingly talked to himself ;—

“ Unfortunate man that I am !  
 I’ve never a client but grief ;  
 The case is, I’ve no case at all,  
 And in brief, I’ve ne’er had a brief !

“ I’ve waited, and waited in vain,  
 Expecting an ‘opening’ to find,  
 Where an honest young lawyer might gain  
 Some reward for the toil of his mind.

“ ’Tis not that I’m wanting in law,  
 Or lack an intelligent face,  
 That others have cases to plead,  
 While I have to plead for a case.

“ O, how can a modest young man  
 E’er hope for the smallest progression,—  
 The profession’s already so full  
 Of lawyers so full of profession.”

While thus he was strolling around,  
 His eye accidentally fell  
 On a very deep hole in the ground,  
 And he sighed to himself “ *It is well !*”

To curb his emotions he sat  
 On the curb-stone the space of a minute,  
 Then cried, "Here's an opening at last!"  
 And in less than a jiffy was in it!  
 Next morning twelve citizens came,  
 ('Twas the coroner bade them attend),  
 To the end that it might be determined  
 How the man had determined his end.  
 "The man was a lawyer, I hear,"  
 Said the foreman, who sat on the corse,  
 "A lawyer? alas!" said another,  
 "Undoubtedly died of remorse!"  
 A third said, "He knew the deceased—  
 An attorney well versed in the laws,  
 And as to the cause of his death,  
 'Twas no doubt for the want of a cause."  
 The jury decided at length  
 After solemnly weighing the matter,  
 That the lawyer was drowned because  
 He could not keep his head above water!

The looked for opportunity to renounce the law arrived when, in 1851, Saxe entered the sphere of journalism and became editor and proprietor of the *Vermont Sentinel*, a democratic weekly published in Burlington. Mr. Saxe rightly turned to journalism as offering the readiest means of applying his talents and his tastes. His editorial labors interested him by bringing him into contact with varied phases of humanity and led to unexpected results by involving him



in the small politics of the day. He was, for a time, deputy collector of customs in the Burlington Custom House and later, in 1859 and 1860, ran for governor of Vermont on the democratic ticket, but the nomination was purely complimentary as the party has never gained sufficient strength in the state to elect an executive. Mr. Saxe deemed the matter a great joke and in acceptance of the first nomination wrote a short letter closing with the words: "For further political views, and opinions, I will refer you to my inaugural message." An incident of the campaign gave rise to the following epigram:

#### A CANDID CANDIDATE.

"When John was contending (though sure to be beat)  
In the annual race for the Governor's seat,  
And a crusty old fellow remarked to his face,  
He was clearly too young for so lofty a place,—  
"Perhaps so," said John; "but consider a minute,  
The objection will cease by the time I am in it."

Toward the close of his residence in Burlington Mr. Saxe began to manifest a reserved disposition and became subject to spells of melancholy—forerunners of the gloom that brooded over his later years—during several of which he made attempts upon his own life. One who knew him then says: "He was not the jovial, whole-souled fellow that he appeared in his

poems." Perhaps Saxe was disheartened at not having made more of his brilliant talents and perhaps the choice of a career that made him expected to be funny contributed to this. At any rate he has pointed out in his "Comic Miseries" the disadvantages of being regarded as a comedian :

" My dear young friend, whose shining wit  
Sets all the room ablaze,  
Don't think yourself ' a happy dog'  
For all your merry ways ;  
But learn to wear a sober phiz,  
Be stupid, if you can,  
It's such a very serious thing  
To be a funny man."

Many instances of Saxe's wit yet linger in the memories of Burlington people. At one time he attended a Roman Catholic funeral in the capacity of bearer. High mass was sung and the bearers stood throughout the long service. Finally a companion whispered to the humorist : " Pretty long drawn-out, isn't it, Saxe?" " Yes," was the reply. " They will run it into the ground pretty soon." Another instance, from which his power of incisive raillery and broad appreciation of absurdity may be well judged, is his "Vindication of Saint Peter." David Barker of Maine, a poet of some local celebrity, after the birth of his first child wrote and published the following verses :

One night, as old St. Peter slept,  
 He left the door of Heaven ajar,  
 When through a little angel crept,  
 And came down with a falling star.

One summer as the blessed beams  
 Of morn approached, my blushing bride  
 Awakened from some pleasing dreams,  
 And found that angel by her side.

God grant but this—I ask no more—  
 That when he leaves this world of pain  
 He'll wing his way to that bright shore,  
 And find the way to heaven again.

Saxe seems to have been sceptical as to the divine origin of the "little angel" for, deeming injustice to have been done the good saint, he penned the following hitherto unpublished vindication as St. Peter's reply :

Full eighteen hundred years or more  
 I've kept my gate securely fast ;  
 There has no "little angel" strayed,  
 Nor recreant through the portals passed.

I did not sleep, as you supposed,  
 Nor leave the door of heaven ajar,  
 Nor has a "little angel" left  
 And gone down with a falling star.

Go ask that blushing bride and see  
 If she don't frankly own and say,  
 That when she found that angel babe,  
 She found it in the good old way.

God grant but this—I ask no more—  
 That should your number still enlarge,  
 You will not do as done before,  
 And lay it to old Peter's charge.

In his "Carmen Lætum," recited after dinner before the Alumni of Middlebury College at their semi-centennial celebration in 1850, after commenting on the general good health of his Alma Mater, Saxe adverts to an effort to unite Middlebury and the University of Vermont.

" Indèed, I must tell you a bit of a tale,  
To show you she's feeling remarkably hale ;  
How she turned up her nose, but a short time ago,  
At a rather good-looking importunate beau,  
And how she refused, with a princess-like carriage,  
' A very respectable offer of marriage !'

" You see, my dear Brothers, a neighboring college  
Who values himself on the depth of his knowledge,  
With a prayer for her love, and eye to her land,  
Walked up to the lady and offered his hand.  
For a minute or so she was all in a flutter,  
And had not a word she could audibly utter ;  
For she felt in her bosom, beyond all concealing,  
A kind of a—sort of a—widow-like feeling !  
But recovering soon from the delicate shock,  
She held up her head like an old-fashioned clock,  
And, with proper composure, went on and defined,  
In suitable phrases, the state of her mind ;  
Said she wouldn't mind changing her single condition,  
Could she fairly expect to improve her position ;  
And thus, by some words of equivocal scope,  
Gave her lover decided ' permission to hope.'  
It were idle to talk of the billing and cooing  
The amorous gentleman used in his wooing ;  
Or how she replied to his pressing advances ;  
His oscular touches and ocular glances ;—

'Tis enough that his courtship, by all that is known,  
Was quite the old story, and much like your own !

“ Thus the matter went on, till the lady found out,  
One very fine day, what the rogue was about,—  
That all that he wanted was merely the power  
By marital license to pocket her dower,  
And then to discard her in sorrow and shame,  
Bereaved of her home and her name and her fame.  
In deep indignation she turned on her heel,  
With such withering scorn as a lady might feel  
For a knave, who, in stealing her miniature case,  
Should take the gold setting and leave her the face !  
But soon growing calm as the breast of the deep,  
When breezes are hushed that the waters may sleep,  
She sat in her chair, like a dignified elf,  
And thus, while I listened, she talked to herself :—  
'Nay, 'twas idle to think of so foolish a plan  
As a match with this pert University-man,  
For I haven't a chick but would redden with shame  
At the very idea of my losing my name ;  
And would feel that no sorrow so heavy could come  
To his mother as losing her excellent home.  
'Tis true I am weak, but my children are strong,  
And won't see me suffer privation or wrong ;  
So, away with the dream of connubial joys,  
I'll stick to the homestead, and look to the boys ! ”

Mr. Saxe did not try to make the *Sentinel* a power in politics or literature for his literary fame was broadening and his services as a lecturer being more in demand, his dependence upon journalism for a livelihood was less essential, yet he certainly enjoyed his editorial labors

and in his verses several clever sketches attest the influence of the newspaper office.

These lines were probably the fruit of an editorial day dream :

“ In the close precincts of a dusty room  
That owes few losses to the lazy broom,  
There sits the man ; you do not know his name,  
Brown, Jones, or Johnson—it is all the same,—  
Scribbling away at what perchance may seem  
An idler’s musing, or a dreamer’s dream ;  
His pen runs rambling, like a straying steed ;  
The ‘we’ he writes seems very ‘wee’ indeed ;  
But watch the change ; behold the wondrous power  
Wrought by the press in one eventful hour ;  
To-night, ’tis harmless as a maiden’s rhymes ;  
To-morrow, thunder in the *London Times* !  
The ministry dissolves that held for years ;  
Her Grace, the Duchess, is dissolved in tears ;  
The Rothschilds quail ; the church, the army, quakes ;  
The very kingdom to its centre shakes ;  
The Corn Laws fall, the price of bread comes down,—  
Thanks to the ‘we’ of Johnson, Jones, or Brown !”

The following skit in the columns of the *Sentinel* in the year 1851 was suggested by a communication from an irate subscriber to whom the editor’s political views did not command themselves :

“ A free soil patron of the *Sentinel*  
Politely bids us ‘send the thing to hell.’  
A timely hint. ’Tis proper, we confess,  
With change of residence to change the address ;  
It shall be sent, if Charon’s mail will let it,  
Where the subscriber will be sure to get it.”

In 1856, no longer finding it necessary to rely upon journalism, Mr. Saxe sold the *Sentinel* and trusted to literature for a living. The trust was securely placed for, through economical treatment of his income, he acquired means which afforded him an opportunity for leisure and travel.

Mr. Saxe's life in Burlington was quiet. He was domestic in his tastes and supremely happy in his home surroundings. His family consisted of a wife and five children: John Theodore, born April 22, 1843; Charles Gordon, born June 7, 1848; Sarah Elizabeth, born February 10, 1850; Harriet Sollace, born August 14, 1853, and Laura Sophia, born November 13, 1856. A son, George Brown Saxe, born February 1, 1846, was the only one of the poet's six children that did not live to maturity. His death on November 18, 1847, suggested the sonnet "Bereavement" which serves as a companion piece to Longfellow's "Resignation."

#### BEREAVEMENT.

Nay, weep not, dearest, though the child be dead;  
 He lives again in Heaven's unclouded life,  
 With other angels that have early fled  
 From these dark scenes of sorrow, sin and strife.  
 Nay, weep not, dearest, though thy yearning love  
 Would fondly keep for earth its fairest flowers,  
 And e'en deny to brighter realms above

The few that deck this dreary world of ours ;  
 Though much it seems a wonder and a woe  
 That one so loved should be so early lost,  
 And hallowed tears may unforbidden flow  
 To mourn the blossom that we cherished most,  
 Yet all is well ; God's good design I see,  
 That where our treasure is, our hearts may be.

As a "Family Man" Mr. Saxe was an entire success, despite his seemingly querulous lines under that title. Mrs. Saxe, a worthy and devoted woman, was most dear to him and her sudden death contributed above all else to the gloom that enshrouded his later years. To her the poet dedicated the Diamond edition of his poems (1874) as follows :

"To my Best Friend, (A Diamond Edition of a Woman,) I Inscribe This Diamond Edition of the Poems of Her Husband

J. G. S."

The daughters are described as extremely beautiful girls. Of the three Miss Sarah was perhaps the wittiest and most brilliant, while Miss Harriet was more quiet in her tastes and attainments. John, the eldest son, graduated from Vermont University in 1862. He was a member of Lambda Iota and took high rank as a student. He was exceptionally bright and once or twice turned his hand to writing verse, but his literary



efforts were persistently discouraged by his father, and he soon relinquished them. Upon his graduation he engaged in the lumber business with his uncle Charles in Troy, New York.

Mr. Saxe had a lounge made to order, to accommodate his great length and after supper, clad in dressing gown and slippers, he would often throw himself upon it with some such remark as, "Now if any one is happier than I am I'd like to see him." His domestic contentment frequently shines forth in his verses in the expression of such sentiments as this:

I see a group of boys and girls  
 Assembled round the knee paternal,  
 With ruddy cheeks and tangled curls,  
 And manners not at all supernal.  
 And one has reached a manly size ;  
 And one aspires to woman's stature ;  
 And one is quite a recent prize,  
 And all abound in human nature !  
 The boys are hard to keep in trim ;  
 The girls are often rather trying ;  
 And baby—like the cherubim—  
 Seems very fond of steady crying !  
 And yet the precious little one,  
 His mother's dear, despotic master,  
 Is worth a thousand babies done  
 In Parian or in alabaster !

Perhaps the best tribute to Mr. Saxe's success as a family man is the last will of his eldest son, from which we venture to make an excerpt.

"As my brother Charles has been to me all that a brother should be, and as my knowledge of his character for all that is good and manly in all the trials of life covers an experience of over thirty years, I, with most perfect confidence, commit to his guardianship my infant son, John Godfrey Saxe, asking him to see that so far as may be in his power my boy grows up to be a healthy, cultivated, manly and Christian gentleman. My son John will, with a father's blessing, bear in mind as he grows to manhood that his father and his mother, who has gone before but who often spoke of it before her death, wished him of all things to be a good man rather than rich or distinguished; hoping still that he would make the best and the most of the talents God has evidently given him, and be an honor to the name he bears."

Saxe's relatives recall many instances of his cleverness suggested by domestic events. His youngest brother, James, a merchant of St. Albans, Vermont, was married in 1850 to Sarah Storrs Sollace, the youngest sister of the poet's wife. Bearing this relationship in mind one can appreciate the following message from the poet to the bride during the wedding trip:

"Oh lovely Sal, you naughty gal,  
Pray how's your noble Jim?  
And how is she who made for me  
A brother-in-law of him?"

The wit of the family was not confined to the poet for this same brother once made the observation that he dealt in dry goods and John in dry jokes. Twin sons of Charles Saxe were named by him after his brothers John and James. The remaining brother, Peter, said that they should both have been named after him, Peter. "That would be Peter and Re-peater!" retorted the poet. Upon the birth of the same twins—who are now Saxe & Saxe, attorneys, of Boston—the poet sent their father the following lines :

" The proverb says in somber tone  
 ' Troubles seldom come alone' ;  
 But, to recompense our cares,  
 Blessings are sometimes sent in pairs,  
 Thus, when a single babe was due,  
 The grateful father welcomed two.  
 God bless them in this world of trouble !  
 May both find all their blessings double,  
 And, to the joy of sire and mother,  
 Each prove an honor to his brother !"

## V.

In 1860 Mr. Saxe decided to remove to Albany, New York, as likely to be a city more congenial to his social tastes and widening reputation, and in April of that year he made the change, taking with him his family, excepting his eldest son, then a sophomore in Vermont University. Mr. Saxe purchased an Albany residence upon Madison Avenue, nearly opposite the cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Here for the dozen years ensuing he made his home, and his tall form was a familiar sight upon the streets of the city. This period comprehended the happiest days of the poet's life; he was surrounded by a loving family and a host of friends; the best society was at his command; his means were ample and he was so situated that he could feel the pulse beat of public events without taking any more share in them than he chose. He was now at the height of his fame; the reputation given him by "Proud Miss MacBride" had been still further spread by the magazines, to which, chiefly *Harper's* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, he was a regular and valued contributor until as late as 1874. It was at this time, also, that the popular lecture was rampant as a source of public education and incidentally as a

replenisher of depleted literary exchequers, and no leading "lecture course" was thought complete unless it contained the name of the foremost poet of satire and humor. Saxe drew equally well with Wendell Phillips, George William Curtis, Henry Ward Beecher, Rev. Dr. E. H. Chapin, Anna E. Dickinson and others who, in the decade from 1859, were kept on the go from early fall until the spring apples were ripe. Saxe was not a forcible lecturer in prose and often his hearers were a trifle disappointed at his rendering of his own verses, which were put to the test of repeated delivery, yet he held his place on the lecture programs by virtue of the reputation his poems had given him. He had but to set the date and name his price, as an opportunity to see the author of "Proud Miss MacBride" was not to be missed by the lecture-going people of the day. To the *eyes* of the audience, at least, the investment must have seemed a wise one, for at his best, physically, Saxe was a remarkably handsome man. He was six feet two inches tall, proudly erect and muscular, with a large, round and finely poised head set upon broad and stalwart shoulders. Photographs of him taken at this time represent his face in profile—a high, broad, intellectual forehead, wavy brown hair in abundance and keen, deepset eyes,

which were gray in color, and remarkably expressive. His feature outlines, strong and suggestive, except for the chin, were set off by a heavy moustache and "Burnside" whiskers. Saxe laughingly alludes to his size in his "Rhymed Epistle to the Editor of the Knickerbocker Magazine", in the lines :

"Now I am a man, you must learn,  
 Less famous for beauty than strength,  
 And, for aught I could ever discern,  
 Of rather superfluous length.  
 In truth 'tis but seldom one meets  
 Such a Titan in human abodes,  
 And when I stalk over the streets,  
 I'm a perfect Colossus of roads !"

Mr. Saxe's last regular occupation was upon the Sentinel, but, while in Albany, he was connected with the *Albany Evening Journal* as correspondent, and was frequently called upon to write editorials both for this paper and for the Albany Morning Argus. The Hon. William Cassidy, proprietor of the latter sheet, was a democrat and at this time perhaps the nearest personal friend of the poet and to him Saxe dedicated the "Highgate" edition (1871) of his poems. Many an hour did these two cronies while away in the Argus editorial rooms when there was not over much to do, and whenever Saxe roamed in during busy hours he

would pick up a book or novel and soon become lost in it, totally oblivious of the surrounding confusion and rush of a newspaper editorial department. He would often sit with his feet cocked up on one of the reporters' tables, comfortably fitted into a reporter's chair, and perhaps smoking a reporter's pipe, reading a novel until way along into the "wee sma' hours." Saxe occasionally wrote criticisms and reviews for the *Argus* and a son of Mr. Cassidy, who was then a small boy, tells of the way the poet would come into the editorial rooms. "He would wander in, say good day to the reporters, then hunting around until he found a book he thought he would like he would bury himself in it. Casually my father would ask him if he would not write a review for the paper. 'Saxe, won't you write that book up for us? We haven't had time yet.' 'Well, I don't know; yes, I guess so' he would reply and go on reading. Presently, falling upon a passage that pleased him, he would start up and shoving the book into the pocket of his velveteen jacket (a style of coat of which he was always very fond) would say; 'I guess I'll carry this away with me.' That was usually the last seen of the book, but in a day or two the criticism would appear."

In his happier days Mr. Saxe enjoyed to the utmost travel and social life. He was a bright

member of many a literary gathering, being known, personally, to all the most prominent of contemporary poets and prose writers. He loved to watch the men and women about him and keen powers of observation coupled with a facile pen gave birth to many of his cleverest productions, such as "Le Jardin Mabille," "Some Pencil Pictures," "The Way of the World," and "The Mourner à la Mode," where he dwells with quiet humor on the specious grief displayed in "billows of crape,"

"Indeed, it is scarce without measure,  
The sorrow that goes by the yard."

Twenty three consecutive summers Mr. Saxe spent at the springs in Saratoga where he wrote some of his best verses. At such a place he was in his element ; a brilliant conversationalist and something of a ladies' man withal, he never tired of talking when he had a good subject and interested listeners, and often he would spend many happy hours conversing far into the night. The fashions and foibles of the famous watering place afforded a rich mine of satire and how diligently the poet worked it may be discovered by a run through his collected poems. The "Song of Saratoga" was caught up by the public when it first appeared and for years was as regular in its summer rounds of the press as was Clement



C. Moore's "Night Before Christmas" as a bird of winter passage.

SONG OF SARATOGA.

"Pray, what do they do at the Springs?"

The question is easy to ask ;

But to answer it fully, my dear,

Were rather a serious task.

And yet, in a bantering way,

As the magpie or mocking-bird sings,

I'll venture a bit of a song

To tell what they do at the Springs !

*Imprimis*, my darling, they drink

The waters so sparkling and clear ;

Though the flavor is none of the best,

And the odor exceedingly queer ;

But the fluid is mingled, you know,

With wholesome medicinal things,

So they drink, and they drink, and they drink,—

And that's what they do at the Springs !

Then with appetites keen as a knife,

They hasten to breakfast or dine ;

(The latter precisely at three,

The former from seven till nine.)

Ye gods ! what a rustle and rush

When the eloquent dinner bell rings !

Then they eat, and they eat, and they eat,—

And that's what they do at the Springs !

Now they stroll in the beautiful walks,

Or lo! in the shade of the trees ;

Where many a whisper is heard

That never is told by the breeze ;

And hands are commingled with hands,

Regardless of conjugal rings ;  
 And they flirt, and they flirt, and they flirt,—  
 And that's what they do at the Springs !  
 The drawing-rooms now are ablaze,  
 And music is shrieking away ;  
 Terpsichore governs the hour,  
 And Fashion was never so gay !  
 An arm round a tapering waist,  
 How closely and fondly it clings !  
 So they waltz, and they waltz, and they waltz,—  
 And that's what they do at the Springs !  
 In short—as it goes in the world—  
 They eat, and they drink, and they sleep ;  
 They talk, and they walk, and they woo ;  
 They sigh, and they laugh, and they weep ;  
 They read, and they ride, and they dance ;  
 (With other unspeakable things :)  
 They pray, and they play, and they *pay*,—  
 And that's what they do at the Springs !

In 1867, leaving his two elder daughters in the family of his brother James and his youngest in a convent near Albany, Mr. Saxe, accompanied by his wife, visited Europe. This trip was not idled away but was productive of results which added both to the fame and the fortune of the poet. Mr. and Mrs. Saxe visited the Paris Exposition of that year and also met the present Prince of Wales. The "Cockney," one of Saxe's wittiest sketches, is reminiscent of the trip.

## THE COCKNEY.

It was in my foreign travel,  
     At a famous Flemish inn,  
 That I met a stoutish person  
     With a very ruddy skin ;  
 And his hair was something sandy,  
     And was done in knotty curls,  
 And was parted in the middle,  
     In the manner of a girl's.  
 He was clad in checkered trousers,  
     And his coat was of a sort,  
 To suggest a scanty pattern,  
     It was bobbed so very short ;  
 And his cap was very little,  
     Such as soldiers often use ;  
 And he wore a pair of gaiters,  
     And extremely heavy shoes.  
 I addressed the man in English,  
     And he answered in the same,  
 Though he spoke it in a fashion  
     That I thought a little lame ;  
 For the aspirate was missing  
     Where the letter should have been,  
 But where'er it wasn't wanted,  
     He was sure to put in !  
 When I spoke with admiration  
     Of St. Peter's mighty dome,  
 He remarked : "'Tis really nothing  
     To the sights we 'ave at 'ome !"  
 And declared upon his honor,—  
     Though, of course, 'twas very queer,—  
 That he doubted if the Romans  
     'Ad the hart of making beer !

When I named the Colosseum,  
 He observed, "'Tis very fair ;  
 I mean, ye know, it *would* be,  
 If they'd put it in repair ;  
 But what progress or *himprovement*  
 Can those curst *Hitalians* 'ope  
 While they're *hunder* the dominion  
 Of that blasted muff, the Pope?"

Then we talked of other countries,  
 And he said that he had heard  
 That *Hamericans* spoke *Hinglish*,  
 But he deemed it quite *habsurd* ;  
 Yet he felt the deepest *hinterest*  
 In the missionary work,  
 And would like to know if Georgia  
 Was in Boston or New York !

When I left the man-in-gaiters,  
 He was grumbling, o'er his gin,  
 At the charges of the hostess  
 Of that famous Flemish inn ;  
 And he looked a very Briton,  
 (So, methinks, I see him still),  
 As he pocketed the candle  
 That was mentioned in the bill !

## VI.

Again deciding to change his residence, Mr. Saxe, in 1872, removed to Brooklyn, N. Y., where he bought a home at No. 28 First place. The location was one of the coolest and pleasantest in the city while among the poet's neighbors were Austin Corbin, Demas Barnes, the Rev. Dr. Ludlow and other people of culture and refinement. The house was a three-story brown-stone edifice with a deep court yard in front, which was covered with close green turf.

In the poet's last collection we find a reference to his home in his lines

## TO A BACHELOR FRIEND IN THE COUNTRY.

Come and see us, any day ;  
 With his choicest mercies  
 Heaven has showered my rugged way,  
 Plenty—as my verses.  
 Share my home, oh lonely elf,  
 Cosiest of houses,  
 Wisely ordered, like myself !  
 By the best of spouses.  
 Though 'tis small upon the ground,  
 I may fairly mention  
 Toward the sky it will be found  
 Of sublime extension.  
 Narrow is a city-lot,  
 When you've truly said it ;  
 But the "stories" we have got  
 You would scarcely credit !

Though the stairs are something tall,  
 You have but to clamber  
 Up the fourth ; " upon the wall  
 Is the Prophet's chamber."  
 Thence my garden you may view,  
 Kept with costly labor,  
 Specially for me and you,  
 By my wealthy neighbor.

Books, you hardly need be told—  
 Wait your welcome coming ;  
 Some I warrant—mainly old—  
 Worthy of your thumbing.  
 For the rest, I only swear,  
 Though they're rather recent,  
 You will find the printing fair,  
 And the binding decent.

Breakfast?—Mutton chops at eight  
 (Cook will do them nicely).  
 Dinner?—What you choose to state,  
 Served at two precisely.  
 Bed?—Delicious (not a few  
 Were the swans who lined it)  
 As a bachelor like you,  
 Could expect to find it !

Here, then, Saxe designed to spend the waning years of his life in happiness and contentment. He had accumulated a competence and expected to live out his allotted days in peace surrounded by his children ; but little did he anticipate how heavily the hand of Fate was to be laid upon him. His former melancholy began to grow upon him more and more

and, as if warned of the trouble that lay before him, he bought, soon after fixing his residence in Brooklyn, a family burying lot in Greenwood cemetery that was fittingly adorned for the interment that all too speedily was made in it. His first sorrow was in 1874. His youngest daughter, Laura, had contracted lung trouble while at a boarding school in Massachusetts. After nobly battling with the disease she returned from an unavailing sojourn in Florida to die.

The next spring, while returning home at the close of a lecture tour in the south, in an accident on the Panhandle road near Wheeling, West Virginia, the sleeping car in which Mr. Saxe had a berth was derailed and thrown down a steep embankment. The other passengers were gathered near when a lady cried out, "I don't see the tall gentleman whose berth was opposite mine." Search was at once made, but meanwhile a fellow passenger, who had escaped, bethought him of a sum of money which he had left behind. On returning to the car he stumbled upon the bruised and insensible poet wedged between heavy timbers. Mr. Saxe was thereby rescued from a revolting death for the sleeper in which he was found, after a brief interval following his rescue, became a mass of seething flames. Even under these fearful circumstances

the poet's wit did not fail him, for when some one asked him how he liked "Riding on the Rail" now, he replied "A great deal better than riding off from it!" Mr. Saxe's flesh was bruised, but no bones were broken and outwardly he seemed to have escaped with slight bodily injuries. Returning to his Brooklyn home he recovered from the wounds received in the accident, but his nervous system had suffered a shock from which it never rallied. This, as appeared upon examination after his death, was induced, at least in part, by a severe blow upon the head, received no doubt in the wreck, which had affected the poet's brain.

Up to this time Mr. Saxe was a splendid and conspicuous specimen of virile manhood but from now on all was changed. The grievous and insidious nervous shock was intensified by added sorrows. Slowly but surely the consequent weakness overspread and undermined his whole physical being; he began to experience a greater degree of bodily and mental fatigue; daily his form became more bent and his step more feeble and his spirits more subdued until at last his mind lost altogether its wonted buoyancy. Excepting the ill-starred lecture tour referred to, Mr. Saxe's last appearance before the general public was on September 27, 1873, when he



read an ode on the occasion of the unveiling of a bust of John Howard Payne, in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. However, true to fraternal promptings, he read some post prandial verses at Delmonico's, on April 8, 1874, the occasion being a festival of the Forty-first Annual convention of Psi Upsilon. Among other sentiments the poet expresses a dislike to being termed old and says :

“Is he old who, in spite of his fast thinning curls,  
Has a joke for the boys and a smile for the girls !

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

Is he old who owes nothing to fraudulent art ?  
Above all, is he old who is young at the heart ?”

These words came very near being ironical.

In 1875 the poet's last collection came from press—“Leisure Day Rhymes”—and these show his waning power. The pristine vigor of his earlier verses is not so evident and he is occupied with more placid themes. More touches upon theology occur. In “Here and Hereafter” he says :

“As for me,  
My creed is short as any man's may be ;  
'Tis written in the ‘Sermon on the Mount,’  
And in the ‘Pater Noster’ ; I account  
The words ‘Our Father’ (had we lost the rest  
Of that sweet prayer, the briefest and the best  
Of all the liturgies) of higher worth,  
To ailing souls, than all the creeds on earth.”

And in "Miserere Domine" he says :

"'Our Father!' Ever blessed name !  
To Thee we bring our sin and shame ;  
Weak though we be, perverse of will,  
Thou art our gracious Father still,  
Who knowest well how frail we be.

*Miserere Domine !"*

The perennially appropriate ode to the New York legislature, in which he says that if we are expected to respect the laws "'tis not best to see them made," shows a vivid flash of the old-time fire.

In 1879 death again invaded the poet's house, the second victim being his eldest and favorite daughter Sarah, then in the thirtieth year of her age. Scarcely had a year elapsed when Mrs. Saxe, a noble woman who had always been all to him that a wife should be, died suddenly of a syncope which burst a blood vessel in the brain and was put tenderly away in dreamless rest. She had always been a strong and robust woman and at this last blow, the most crushing of all, the already stricken poet was beside himself. The mother of his children dead ! She who had been so tender a helpmeet for forty years ! It was too utterly monstrous for credence and for days Saxe sat in his room with bowed head repeating over and over to himself the words, "I can't believe it."

Other trials were yet in store. In June, 1881, the dark reaper for the fourth time entered his home, this time cutting down his sole remaining daughter, Harriet. After his first three afflictions Mr. Saxe resolved to maintain his charming home in Brooklyn, but at the death of Miss Hattie his heart broke. On Sunday, June 5th, the day of the funeral, many of his old friends attended the services, expecting to catch a glimpse of him, but he did not leave his room, and could not be induced to ride to the cemetery. The poet's mental malady so clouded his mind as to shut out all the pleasures of life. He occupied his room and scarcely ever could be induced to leave it. Old friends, to whom he had formerly been closely attached, would gladly have endeavored to cheer him, but he rejected all overtures and was inaccessible, a prey to the settled melancholy that was to overshadow him till his death. This melancholy was further enhanced by his finding, upon attempting to do some literary work, that his pen faltered and his thoughts were weak. Grief over the swift course of death and the departure of his old gifts combined to produce acute mental misery which he attributed to imaginary physical ills. His physician, Dr. Wanderlich, wrote of him: "I have never encountered a more obstinate man.

He sits in his room all day long, grieving over the loss of his power as a poet, and imagining that he is the greatest sufferer. I cannot detect that he is physically any worse than one of his age would naturally be supposed to be. His ailment is chiefly mental, and his mind has assumed a most painful hypochondriacal hue. He imagines that he cannot eat anything, yet he consumes plenty of food. Then he thinks that he is wasting away in flesh, but I cannot detect that he is growing any thinner, and I sometimes think he is gaining flesh. He does not go out of his room, and cannot be coaxed or driven to take exercise. I think that if he would take plenty of exercise, change the scene of his daily life, and seek companions who would divert his mind from himself, he would recover his animal spirits, and be more like the brilliant, witty man he once was."

Mr. Saxe's condition was in sorrowfully striking contrast to his mood when he wrote the following

#### LINES ON MY THIRTY-NINTH BIRTHDAY.

Oh, few that roam this world of ours,  
To feel its thorns and pluck its flowers,  
Have trod a brighter path than mine  
From blithe thirteen to thirty-nine.  
Health, home, and friends (life's solid part,)  
A merry laugh, a fresh young heart,

Poetic dreams and love divine—  
 Have I not these at thirty-nine?  
 Oh, Time! Forego thy wasted spite,  
 And lay thy future lashes light,  
 And, trust me, I will not repine,  
 At twice the count of thirty-nine.

How sadly did Father Time answer the poet's prayer! A few years previously his verses were eagerly accepted by the leading periodicals, he was the nation's wit and humorist whose delicious rhymes brought to himself fame and a competence and to many a household the cheerful smile or hearty laugh. Even across the sea he was known as the "Thomas Hood of America." Yet at sixty-five his condition much resembled the closing days of Scott, Southey, Cowper, and Tom Moore. Mr. Saxe now made no effort to combat his melancholy. His light had gone out forever; not a gleam recalled the brilliant flashes of wit that had played so merrily across the literary firmament of twenty years ago and his last years afford but another instance of the fatality that seems especially to beset the sons of laughter.

## VII.

The stricken poet was now inaccessible to all. He would allow none to approach him, yet his domestic solitude was more than he could bear and he soon sold his Brooklyn home and was taken to Albany to the home of his eldest son. Even here misfortune followed for once again the inexorable hand of fate was laid heavily upon him. Within the month preceding his son's wife had died. Nine weeks after her decease John himself, not arising at the usual hour, was found dead in bed. Thus, in the brief space of seven years, had the poet's wife, his three daughters, his eldest son and his daughter-in-law crossed the mystic river before his very eyes. What wonder then, that death seemed to him his best friend as with whitened locks, bent form and sad eyes he wearily sought shelter with his only surviving child, Charles, beneath whose roof-tree he was to spend the last sorrowful years of his life, brooding hopelessly in solitude over his afflictions, his mind still haunted by joyous memories of the golden past.

When Mr. Saxe began to feel in some degree the stability of this last shelter, he made a last pitiful effort to hold at bay the grief that oppressed his being. During the first three years he spent some hours each pleasant day loitering in the beautiful park near his son's house

or tranquilly seated in a shady arbor, watching the children at their play. He chatted with the members of his son's family or read the newspapers. A bright young man was secured for a companion and he tried to forget, but it was of no avail, the struggle was a vain one, and in 1884 he withdrew altogether from the eyes of men. With his retirement his literary fame had declined; death and the turmoil of life wrought neglect even among his quondam admiring companions, until now, except for an occasional sympathetic reference in the public prints, hardly a person knew that one who, in his time, did more than any other to brighten the world around him, was ending his days apart from his fellow men, crushed by bereavements and the victim of a settled melancholy. It is one of the eccentricities of fate that a man whose mission was to gladden others should thus drag out his last years, dead to the world which was once so kind to him. In the poet's own words: "Isn't it queer that one who made others laugh should end his days so in sorrow?"

Charles Saxe occupied two adjoining brown-stone houses connected by alcoves and situated on State street barely a stone's throw from the great capitol. In the spacious double home of his son, who ever ministered to his wants with

filial tenderness and solicitude, the poet was given spacious quarters where he existed rather than lived for three years more, despite the predictions of eminent physicians, whom his family had consulted in his behalf in 1881, on his first coming to Albany, that he would not survive two years longer.

These last three years of the once exuberant poet and stalwart man were pathetic in the extreme. He was much changed in form and feature being but the shadow of his former virile self. With hair that was silvery white, a full, gray-white beard, a form bent and emaciated, a tottering step and a face pallid and shrunken—the clear gray eyes alone bore witness to the strength of other days. Physically a wreck, his mind, though feeble and languid, was clear up to the time of his death.

The poet's daily existence was not varied. He rose about 6:30 and retired between the hours of nine and ten. His food was of the plainest description as he suffered much from indigestion, as well as from insomnia and neuralgia in the head—the latter superinduced, no doubt, by the blow received in the railroad accident. Throughout the day he would move leisurely about, often lost in meditation, recline upon a couch or sit in an easy chair gazing out upon the river,



his mind ever and anon reverting to his irreparable bereavements. Of his wife and children he often spoke tenderly and regretfully, manifesting a keen interest in the proper care of their graves. Part of his time he devoted to a perusal of the leading magazines, sent him regularly and unsolicited by the publishers thereof, in kindly remembrance of past favors, or occasionally he would read a few pages in one of his favorite prose authors, usually Hawthorne, Dickens or Thackeray, judiciously selecting therefrom matter of cheerful tone. The newspapers he refused to look at, manifesting no interest in current events. He would say "it pains me to meet with the details of so much crime and so many casualties," and this was no new sentiment to him, for in "The Press," written in 1855, occur these lines :

The *News*, indeed ! pray do you call it news  
 When shallow noddles publish shallow views?  
 Pray, is it news that turnips should be bred  
 As large and hollow as the owner's head ?  
*News*, that a clerk should rob his master's hoard  
 Whose meagre salary scarcely pays his board ?  
*News*, that two knaves, their spurious friendship o'er,  
 Should tell the truths which they concealed before ?  
*News*, that a maniac weary of his life,  
 Should end his sorrows with a rope or knife ?  
*News*, that a wife should violate the vows  
 That bind her, loveless, to a tyrant spouse ?

*News*, that a daughter cheats paternal rule,  
 And weds a scoundrel to escape a fool?  
 The news, indeed ! Such matters are as old  
 As sin and folly, rust and must and mould !

At increasingly rare intervals a brighter mood would come upon him, reviving a transient interest in old friends and associations. The name of Longfellow was often on his lips and that poet's death affected him deeply. His memory at times showed momentary gleams of its pristine vigor and at one time he surprised his son not a little by repeating verbatim one of Charles Lamb's longest essays.

One of the few friends who had an opportunity to know something of the poet's recluse existence, wrote in the summer of 1886 ; "During the past two years no public eye has seen him. The apartment in which he spends his melancholy days consists of a suite of three rooms, located in the rear end of the house on the third floor, and overlooking the noble Hudson to the South. Here by the window he whiles away much of his time in watching the busy river craft, and in contemplating the picturesque landscape. Of street attire he no longer has a need ; in dressing-gown and slippers he paces the floor with slow and trembling steps, seldom or never going beyond the confines of his own room."

As time passed on the cloud that brooded over the poet's being settled heavier and yet more darkly. He gave up reading the magazines, nor could he be induced to open a book. At one time Mrs. James Saxe, his wife's sister and brother's wife, who was always a favorite with him, took some books up to his room on the plea that they were in the way down stairs, but he would not allow them to be left, saying gently but firmly, "No. I can't have them here. They remind me of the past." Finally he denied himself to the members of the family, even saying, when asked if he would receive his favorite sister-in-law: "No. Tell her I would like to see her, but—I cannot, I cannot bear to be reminded of what I once was—of the days of my hope and strength, when the world had charms that are now dead to me; before sickness had deprived me of my health, and death had robbed me of my loved ones."

His only companion was now his valet, a middle-aged colored man who, by reason of prior service with eminent people at Washington and other places, was more than ordinarily intelligent and entertaining. With him the poet chatted, sometimes with a more than usual degree of interest and animation. In the poet's apartment hung a small portrait of Thomas

Hood, given him by the English humorist's son, and to this Mr. Saxe attached more than ordinary value. Sometimes in his walk he would pause before it and, gazing sadly at it, say: "I wonder if poor Tom Hood ever suffered as I suffer now!" Again the observation escaped him: "I do not see how any human being can continue to live in a condition so utterly hopeless as mine." The last lustrum of Saxe's life was only a long craving for the final summons to join the loved ones who had gone before.

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The *Century* for June, 1886, contains the following lines to the poet by C. S. Percival:

"O genial Saxe, whose radiant wit  
 Flashed like the lightning from the sky,  
 But, though each flash as keenly hit,  
 Wounded but what deserved to die—  
 Alas! the cloud that shrouds thy day  
 In gathering darkness, fold on fold,  
 Serves not as background for the play  
 Of those bright gleams that charmed of old;  
 For, from its depths where terrors hide,  
 There crashed a bolt of dreadful tone;  
 Scattered thy household treasures wide,  
 And left thee silent, bruised, alone.  
 We miss thy song this pleasant May;  
 And, in the meadows, pause to think:

' What if, amid their bright array,  
 We heard no voice of Bobolink !'  
 Yet charms not now his blithesome lay,  
 Nor flowery mead ' in verdure clad '  
 The world that laughed when thou wast gay,  
 Now weeps to know that thou art sad."

John Godfrey Saxe died on March 31, 1887, and was laid at rest in the family lot in Greenwood by the side of his wife and daughters. Only his relatives and a few personal friends were present at the funeral.

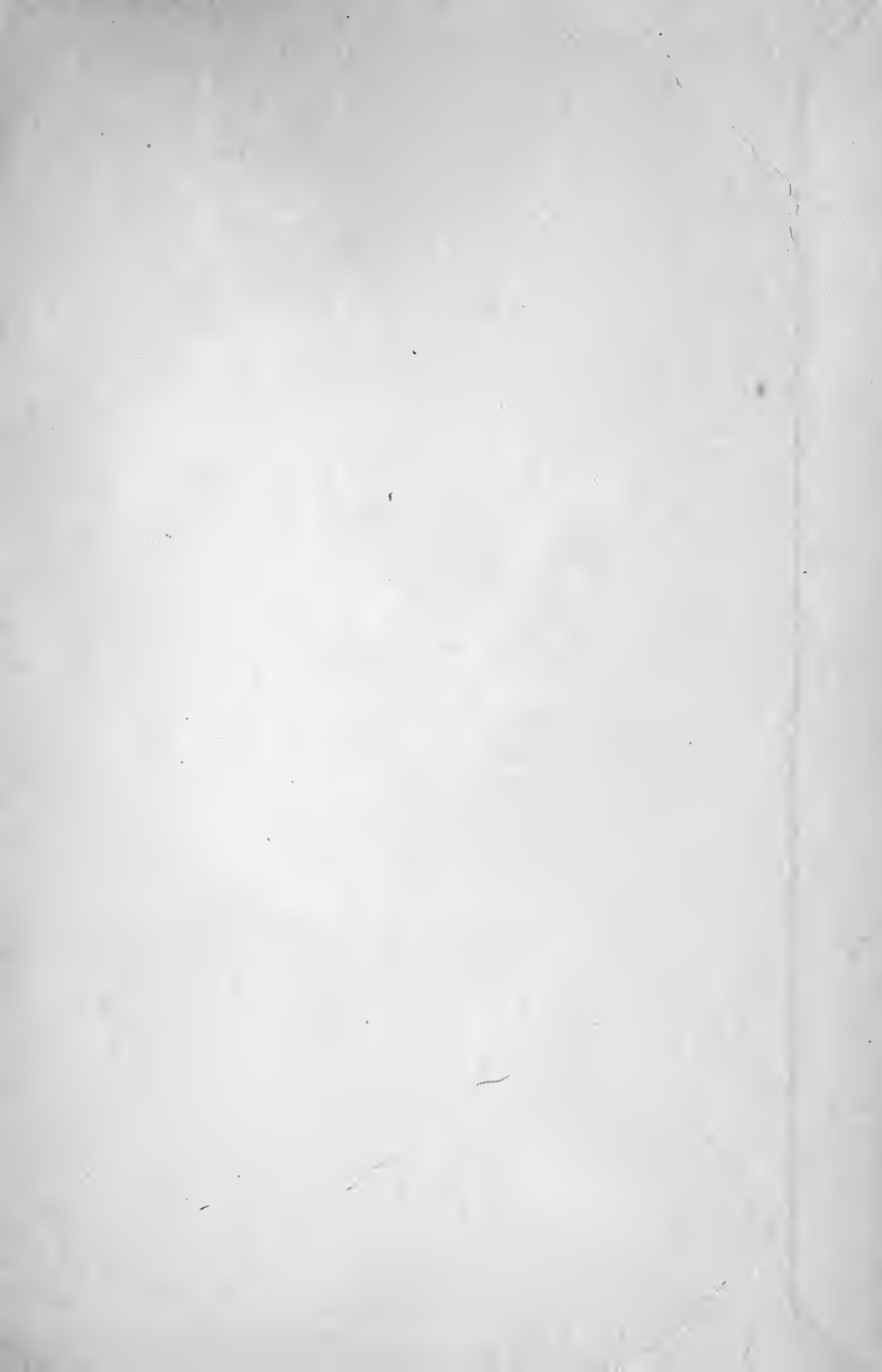
The sad termination of his life reminds one of the well known anecdote of Liston, the famous comedian. One day there came to Abernethy a man who sought cure for a melancholia so confirmed and constant that it threatened to undermine his reason. "Pooh! Pooh!" the famous surgeon replied: "if that is all you are easily cured; go to Covent Garden and see Liston." "Alas!" his patient replied, "I am Liston!"











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